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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the most common forms of international cooperation between legislative libraries from the perspective of Eastern European legislative libraries. The focus is on experience sharing and on the present place of these libraries in expanded European and world-wide communities, as is represented by the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation and the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments. The issues covered range from traditional exchange of printed library materials to possible to forms of future cooperation, the latter being illustrated by a description of the ELVIL (European Legislative Virtual Library) 2000 project. (Author/MES)

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Relations and Co-operation Between Legislative Libraries in the European Community

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Abstract

This paper discusses the most common forms of international co-operation between legislative libraries from the perspective of Eastern European legislative libraries. The focus is on experience sharing and on the present place of these libraries in expanded European and world-wide communities, as is represented by the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments. The issues covered range from traditional exchange of printed library materials to possible forms of future co-operation, the latter being illustrated by a description of the ELVIL 2000 project.

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Paper

1. Introduction

Co-operation between parliamentary libraries, other than the most traditional exchange of documents, invariably brings up the topic of meetings and conferences, professional visits, staff exchanges and partnership. Partnership usually entails joint projects which require a specific contribution from partners; whereas other forms of co-operation are a worthwhile means of sharing

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experience, information, advice and ideas to establish relationships between participants that are more and less experienced, or active and beneficiary. Thanks to the Internet, changes made available to many institutions and individuals have affected ways of co-operation. For instance, electronic mail and web sites, electronic meetings and discussions via list-servers have had a significant impact on communication between libraries, especially in terms of globalisation and quicker than ever "response time", without affecting the substance of these contacts themselves. However, none of these forms - conducted in a traditional or an electronic way - is characteristic either of parliamentary libraries or libraries in general.

Though the perspective of the present paper is essentially Polish, we hope that it will not merely be received as a description of an individual experience, but as a voice in the discussion on the forms of international co-operation that are currently in high demand among legislative libraries.

2. From the storehouse of printed material to the storehouse of electronic knowledge

The title of this section itself conveys in a nutshell the history of co-operation between parliamentary libraries. Most long-established parliamentary libraries began by building a collection giving priority to their own parliamentary and official publications both of national and local coverage. Equally important were the fairly extensive collections of foreign parliamentary and official publications, and publications of international organisations, particularly if their output (conventions, treaties, etc.) had an impact on national legislation. The rationale being that the legislative process and the parliamentary research service supporting it require knowledge about the stages of the legislative process and access to the legislation of partner, neighbour or most influential countries. Until the rapid growth of electronic publications over the recent years, there was practically no other way to meet the potential needs of users than to collect complete runs of titles of interest. And although satisfying the needs of some our users would require a collection as big as that of the Library of Congress, our collection-oriented and largely self-sufficient libraries were also user-oriented because the maintenance of those collections was directly related to the actual needs of users. The "collection-oriented" and "user-oriented" libraries are not necessarily separate concepts and one does not need to be an alternative of the other (as it is sometimes put in professional literature).

As an example, the Polish parliamentary library, established in 1919, gathered a sizeable collection of foreign parliamentary and official publications, mainly from an exchange of printed materials between libraries, based on the consecutive international conventions of 1886 and 1958.

At present, the collection of Polish and foreign parliamentary and official publications holds over 60,000 volumes, and in publications from international organisations (first of all the UN documents collected by the Library as a UN depository library) - over 16,000 volumes. These collections together form 25% of the total collection of the proper parliamentary library which also consists of rich holdings of Polish and foreign books and serials in areas such as law, politics, economy, history and related fields. The Library is now exchanging parliamentary and official publications with some 30 countries, chiefly European, and in a guide to that part of our collections, published in 1998, 270 current titles are listed. On the other hand - current Polish parliamentary materials and official publications are distributed to 65 different partners in these countries, and in most of them our key partners are parliamentary libraries.

Simultaneously, since the mid 1990s, the Library has collected publications available on CD-ROM, chiefly collections of legislation, e.g. French, Spanish, German, Italian, and also collections of documents of organisations such as the European Union or the United Nations. It also uses foreign parliamentary databases available over the Internet (and those of international organisations). Moreover - the Sejm Library now offers access to its own eight databases with links to full-text databases of both chambers of the Polish Parliament maintained outside the Library (http://bs.sejm.gov.pl:4001/ALEPH/).

Since electronic resources are increasingly becoming a basis not only of bibliographic reference services, but also a source of primary documents or original texts, the question arises whether continuing to collect print-on-paper publications is purposeful or not and what is the future of the collection developed until now. We are rather cautious. At the end of 1999, while revising our written collection policy statement, we decided not to give up acquisitions and storage of current print-on-paper journals of laws of individual states (flowing in as free exchange material), and simultaneously to acquire - due to their search value - collections of laws on CD (usually meaning a direct expenditure from the Library budget on their subscription). And we did not take any radical decisions concerning the long-developed and nationally unique collection of foreign parliamentary and official publications. Though shortage of space will one day bring this task into sharp focus. The tendency seems obvious: from the collection-oriented to the virtual legislative library. So far, many libraries, including those in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, are going through a transition period, marked by the will to quickly catch up with the modern, technologically advanced libraries, although hesitations and old habits, and insufficient material resources may stand in the way of this process.

Who will eventually turn out to be right: those prophesising the end of libraries needing a physical location, or those maintaining the continuing need to acquire printed materials in the future, whereby new electronic media would not entirely replace printed documents? I believe that in parliamentary libraries - with the increasing demand of parliamentarians for library services - traditional library functions will continue to play a role but, electronic formats included. It needs to be stressed that our libraries are already switching to information transfer services.

3. Eastern European legislative libraries and the international community

When considering the Eastern European present situation, one has to highlight the importance of the various forms of assistance which - following the events of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and the resulting process of democratisation of the former communist countries - was granted by the international parliamentary community to parliaments and parliamentary libraries in this part of Europe. The most comprehensive assistance in terms of geographical coverage, duration, variety of forms and expended funds was undoubtedly granted by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) under the auspices of the Special U. S. Congressional Task Force on the Development of Parliamentary Institutions in Eastern Europe (commonly known as the Frost Task Force). Parliaments of Western democratic states - the United Kingdom, Canada or Scandinavian countries in relation to the Baltic states, to name a few, participated in this support: organized seminars, professional visits and training courses, donated the most essential reference library materials and facilitated subscription of periodicals, including the very first databases on CD-ROM in our

collections. Through this assistance - granted at the time of revolutionary changes in the information technology environment - new library and research services were launched in newly established democratic parliaments (for instance in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), and several long-established libraries had also completely changed their image and ways of operation (the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland).

The assistance oriented towards the well-identified needs of the individual parliaments - the measurable effects of which are best illustrated and summarized in a book published under the auspices of this particular IFLA Section[1] - has also had a strong international dimension. Thanks to the Parliamentary Institutes (organised by the CRS on its premises), and many workshops and seminars for parliamentary librarians provided by the CRS, the British House of Commons, as well as the European Parliament and Council of Europe in the first half of the 1990s (held throughout Europe, also in some of the countries concerned, like Hungary and the Czech Republic) the new parliamentary librarians got to know each other and succeeded in developing professional and friendly relationships.

Also, the more experienced among us not only received but also provided assistance. For example, the Polish Parliament provided placements in its library, information and research services for colleagues from Albania and Lithuania. A workshop was held in Poland in 1995 on parliamentary research services in the region. Our staff members were also invited as lecturers and speakers to share their experience at seminars and workshops, e. g. for the Baltic States and lately Georgia. Recently, we have been involved in the Ukrainian Center's "Democracy and Development" project to translate and publish selected texts of current Polish law which constitute a basis for our economic and social reforms, and to provide expert opinion on the issues involved. The purpose of this is to give Ukrainian legislators a model and a possible source of inspiration.

The first contacts with Western colleagues encouraged and created a powerful impetus to join international - European and world-wide - communities, first of all the ECPRD and the IFLA Section of Parliamentary Libraries. The ECPRD until the end of 1980s was an organization typical of the then divided Europe: its membership consisted of Western European national parliaments represented in the European Parliament and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. After 1989, the Council of Europe turned out to be most accessible to new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, enabling parliaments (but not libraries) of these countries to become members of the ECPRD. Around that time, the original concept of permanent working groups, set up to cover specific subject areas: data processing, libraries, terminology and thesaurus, was changed and replaced by seminars on subjects of common interest to parliaments. The first meeting of the ECPRD library working party ever hosted by a representative of this part of Europe, and the last one before dissolution of the group, was organized by our Library and held in Warsaw in Autumn 1993.

The most valuable part of the Centre's activity for parliamentary libraries and parliamentary databases has been the support to and promotion of the multilingual thesaurus Eurovoc created by the European Parliament. Independently, sometimes with the financial support of the European Parliament, a number of local (i.e. unofficial) translations of the thesaurus were produced at the individual parliaments, in Albanian, Croatian, Czech, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Slovenian; and many new ones are planned. Various aspects of Eurovoc translation, implementation and use were discussed at several well-attended ECPRD seminars, co-funded by the European Parliament, two of

which were held in Prague in 1995 [2] and in Warsaw in 1996,[3] the last one being in Madrid in 1999. According to the latest data, the thesaurus is used in 15 chambers of parliaments in Europe, and seven more plan to adopt Eurovoc in the near future. Interestingly, these are mostly parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe. This shows the integrating role of Eurovoc as a common language of access to European parliamentary databases, at the national level and that of the European Parliament. In fact, one can understand that long-established Western parliaments have shown less enthusiasm toward the adoption of Eurovoc because it means the costly decision of abandoning the already used indexing language or using both the old and the new.

An expansion process on a much larger scale affected IFLA which grew from a small and "club-like" organization, grouping mainly European libraries and holding the majority of its annual conferences in European cities, to a very large and world-wide association. The process was reflected in the individual sections, including IFLA parliamentary section.

The Section's efforts to integrate the Eastern European parliamentary librarians with the world-wide community, and in particular the immediate reaction to the challenge of changes in Eastern Europe must be stressed. As early as August 1990, at the IFLA General Conference in Stockholm [4], the Section took up the discussion of the role of Western parliamentary libraries in the constitutional reform process in Eastern Europe. In the wake of that, the Section both defined and co-ordinated assistance and co-operation. Two special meetings were held in 1991 in conjunction with the Moscow IFLA Conference, where, following a review of parliamentary libraries in Eastern Europe, requirements and possible forms of assistance from Western parliaments were presented, together with a resolution asking the Inter-Parliamentary Union to act as a co-ordinator of the assistance projects.[5] The Section's *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries*,[6] published at around the same time, became an invaluable source of professional knowledge and ideas for all of us who were involved in setting up new information services for legislators.

After 1990, the Section's membership from Eastern European countries grew considerably, though for some it was not the first contact with the world forum of parliamentary librarians. For the time being - with the exception of the already mentioned contributions to the publication on parliamentary libraries and research services in Central and Eastern Europe - most of us carefully study and observe the situation. Participation in the annual conferences of the Section and other meetings within the main IFLA Conference, as well as the Conferences of Parliamentary Librarians helps maintain our relations and possible co-operation with parliamentary libraries world-wide.

Being a member of IFLA and ECPRD brings us back a feeling of belonging to an **undivided Europe** and to the world. The need to preserve this feeling causes some reserve as we approach one of the goals of this IFLA Section to "encourage the organisation of regional conferences and other forms of regular contact between parliamentary information services operating in particular world regions".

In his paper on a similar topic, our present Chairman, Richard Paré, anticipated the following trend, connected with budgetary restraints in many countries: "... parliamentary and legislative libraries will be inclined to rationalize their services by establishing more partnerships with other non parliamentary libraries (national, academic and special libraries) in their area, notably in collection development and resource sharing".[7]

To illustrate this tendency, let me present ELVIL 2000 (the European Legislative Virtual Library) project implemented across Europe, with partners from different types of institutions, financed from outside sources, using the work of parliamentary services and oriented towards the goals matching the mission of parliamentary services: ensuring effective functioning of a democratic legislature and making the results of this work easily accessible to the citizens. It is also an example of a "co-operative information system", a small number of which was regretted a few years ago by John Brudenall of the Australian Parliament.[8]

4. ELVIL 2000 Project

Some flavour of the future has been provided to our Library by participating in the ELVIL 2000 project financed by the European Commission, DG XIII under the Telematics Programme, Library Section, as a follow-up to the ELVIL project completed in 1999 (http://www.elvil.sub.su.se.).

The participants in the project co-ordinated by the Stockholm University are universities, various types of libraries, publishers and parliaments from Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain (Catalonia), and also - as new partners in the ELVIL 2000 project - Polish and Czech parliamentary libraries as well as the Library of the European Parliament.

The principal goal of the project is to create and operate an Academic Portal to European Law and Politics. Its idea was born out of the conviction and a felt need that in order to achieve active citizenship in the future European Union it is essential that citizens and mass media get access to and understanding of European law and political procedures. One way of supporting this democratisation process is to make information resources on law and politics available over the Internet, and to develop easy access tools for search, selection and presentation of these resources.

Briefly, the most essential component of ELVIL 2000 is the Virtual Library in which one can search in national parliamentary databases and that of the European Parliament using the same WWW-based user interface. A multilingual thesaurus where Eurovoc is used as a switching language, supports searches in several languages. Also available in the Virtual Library is a quality-controlled WWW-index of European law and politics consisting of records with a URL link to the actual source, which can be searched by country or institution and will eventually cover the whole of Europe.

The Virtual Library now provides access to Rixlex - the Swedish parliamentary database, Polis - of the British Parliament, and Epoque - of the European Parliament. Within the ELVIL 2000 project, software gateways (ANSI Z39.50 protocol) to the parliamentary databases of the Czech Republic and Poland will be produced. The software support package will facilitate and speed up the inclusion of a large number of parliamentary databases in the future, while reducing costs.

The other components of ELVIL are the Learning Centre and the Civic Centre. The first one includes the ELVIL Encyclopaedia which contains lectures on European law and politics. At the moment articles on the political and legal structure of the UK, Sweden, Spain and the EU are available, and lectures on Poland and the Czech Republic will be added soon, both in national languages and in English. They cover a number of subject areas, such as: constitutional principles, civil society and systems of representation, key political and legal institutions, processes of legislation, governance and adjudication. The Civic

Centre offers the possibility to contact one's political representative and follow the debate on hot issues in the media.

ELVIL is a library project, but libraries take part in it in a new role: they are active participants in the democratisation process in Europe, and not only traditional intermediary between parliaments, universities, publishers and the ordinary citizen.

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